

STEVE UPTON of Wishbone Ash. What sort of audience did he think the band had?

"Young..... certainly young. I mean the people who are going mad, shouting screaming, and asking for drumsticks are very young kids. They're the new generation. They've never seen Cream or the Stones."

"They're also very astute, and you've got to respect them. I'm not suggesting we patronise them, but it's no use bands slinging out their personal opinions on stage anymore. It's no use getting into your little riff and forgetting that audience. Some bands do. Some bands I see don't deserve to be on stage."

Upton is the articulate talker/drummer with this somewhat astonishing band known as Wishbone Ash. Astonishingly, for without hype, nor false and flashy publicity garbage, they've modestly picked their way through the crowded rock circus with a formula of sheer hard work, and professionalism. It's paid off, they've got their own little plinth now.

"Haven't played for a week. I feel edgy, lost, and I don't know what to do," says Upton, gazing, and acting somewhat nervously. "We dig work so much it's strange having a lay-off, one we shouldn't have anyway."

Upton was referring to the weeks' postponement of their second American tour. Or maybe it's their first — the last was more of an educational excursion. The real test is this week, on their opening Stateside dates.

Since that last visit they've played Britain inside, outside, and inside out.

"It was our first British tour in our own right, and God it's been so very good for us. It's put us in the position of sensing what can be in store. We've seen that



WISHBONE: with Steve Upton, second from left

Wishbone Ash's Steve Upton talks to Roy Hollingworth

we can succeed on a national basis. Nobody knew what audience reaction would be like, there was no indication. Now we have that indication, and it's things like that which help to consolidate certain other things in our career. Now I can see where we are going, it's becoming serious, it's beginning to move — and that helps to spur you on."

Lifeline

Back to these new-blood audiences. "It was touching it made me feel very humble, on several occasions it blew me completely. I don't want to put down the band or anything, but

who else is there who's been doing the country to the intensity we have? I mean who has?" Think about that, it's a hard one.

"We've been very conscious of audiences. I mean let's get it straight right away, no band would be there without them. That's taking it on its most obvious level, but Christ, some bands actually take that for granted — they think they're a bunch of sheep.

And an audience isn't! We are so conscious of them. You've got to respect them.

"People talk of old showbiz, and one's responsibility towards an audience. That's looked on as being uncool, old-hat, well it's not. Rock is showbiz, and one has got to go along the old showbiz

lines of professionalism. Rock, sadly, has so many exits for unprofessionalism that people tend to accept it. What a shame."

It would be wrong to call Wishbone a clinical band, but they are certainly methodical as far as their lifeline is concerned.

"The second album drained us, it was the end of that stage. A phase if you like. It had been spanning over two years. Now we are released from that, we are writing again, and to me it all seems incredibly encouraging. It's nice to be able to sit down with your fellow musicians, after a year's solid work, and jam. You know, have a real good jam. That's a knockout. With doing the

same numbers every night, even though one puts an awful lot of emotion into them, it can become rather mechanical. But then we jam, and there's the magic, it's still there."

Business

What thoughts on America did Upton have? Did he think it good that Wishbone were joining the massive summer migration to the States? "The last tour had an effect on us, this one will. It's hard to say what effect it is, but it is an inevitable one. It's an intense environment for an English man, and he's bound to change a little, especially in

this business. We'll have to see."

"You know it's a nice feeling to think that the small success we have had up to now has been our own doing. You work hard, you get repaid, I'm a great believer in that. It's nice to think that it still all rests on a person. It gives one a certain amount of stability. If we had been hyped, I feel, like everything that has been hyped, we would have been quickly toppled. That's for positive. We wouldn't have been ready for it, if say, someone suddenly lifted us into stardom say six months ago."

But as far as the short lifespan of bands these days, wouldn't even six months of

illimitable success be better than say three years of being honest, but losing out? "Fashion never lives long. We always feel guilty gaining anything we haven't earned. If things come easily, then I firmly believe that's something's wrong. If it comes with hard work, I'll be contented. The band is the vehicle for our emotion, it's our release. Even just one week off has shown me how much a release it is. I'm frustrated already."

Difficult

"I have no complaints. Slowly, and surely, I can see that a lot is going to happen." But how did he view the future of rock, could it's popularity cater for the amount of bands purveying it? "That's a difficult question. Every form of teenager has been through their Dylans, their Beatles, their Zeps. It's a continuing thing, and works in vicious circles. When I first started listening to music, The Who were there — and so was Dylan. There's enough room for all forms of music. Also audiences now aren't so discriminating as they used to be. They'll accept more."

Accept more. Did Upton really think that was a good thing? "Personally I think it's great. If you can dig James Taylor, and at the same time dig The Who — and catch both the moods, then that's great. Music is, after all, a mood, and a human is capable of experiencing many different moods — without getting tired of any of them."

Hard

Wishbone will be back from the States in September. If they are lucky, they'll possibly break even. They are not going over as top billing, and to say the least, it's going to be damned hard.

After that, more heavily dated British gigs. Then a lay-off, then an album. Then maybe the end of phase two. Phase one was slow, at times a little disappointing. Phase two has produced an incredibly fine live band. I'm looking forward to that next step — I think we have a good Wishbone in our hands.